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(54) Optical switching apparatus

(57) An optical matrix switch station (1) is shown mounting a plurality of optical switch units (15, 17), each of which includes a mirror (29), moveable in two axes, for purpose of switching light beams from one optical fiber to another. A mirror assembly (41) is formed from a single body of silicon and comprises a frame portion (43), gimbals (45), mirror portion (47), and related hing-

es (55). Magnets (53, 54) and air coils (89) are utilized to position the central mirror surface (29) to a selected orientation. The moveable mirror and associated magnets along with control LED's (71) are hermetically packaged in a header (81) and mounted with the air coils on mounting bracket (85) to form a micromirror assembly package (99) mounted in each optical switch unit.

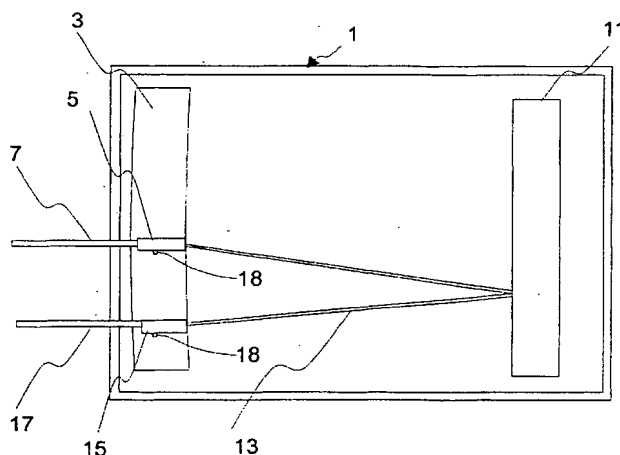


Fig. 1

EP 0 962 796 A2

Description

Related Applications

[0001] Benefit is claimed from Provisional Application No. 60/088,239, filed June 5, 1998.

Field of Invention

[0002] This invention relates generally to optical switching and more particularly to non-electrical switching of laser communication signals.

Background of the Invention

[0003] In recent years optical fibers have come into wide spread use in a wide variety of applications in which optical signals are transmitted along such fibers and are switched from one fiber to another by means of an optical switch. Conventional optical switches generally include fiber positioning means, alignment signal emitter means and interconnected computer control means. A fiber positioning means is provided near the end of each fiber to selectively point the end of a given fiber in one fiber group toward the end of a given fiber in another fiber group for switched optical transmission therebetween. An alignment signal emitter means is provided near an end of and in predetermined spaced relationship to the end of each fiber to emit an alignment signal for receipt and use in controlling the fiber positioning means when aligning the ends of selected fibers in the fiber groups for switched optical transmission therebetween, for example as shown in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,512,036 and 5,177,348. This approach requires considerable complexity and duplication of alignment means for each alignable fiber. It would be very desirable to reduce this complexity and duplication and to increase speed of switching, reliability, as well as to reduce cost in implementation.

Summary of the Invention

[0004] An object of the present invention is to provide an optical switch that overcomes the limitations of the above noted prior art. Another object of the inventions is to provide an optical switching unit which is relatively low in cost, has high speed and is reliable in operation. Briefly in accordance of the invention, an improved optical light transmission switch employs a microelectromechanical (hereinafter MEM) movable mirror assembly with associated electromagnet coils mounted in a package and preferably including control LED's with both drive and LED signals being supplied through a wiring harness. The following described preferred embodiments relate to a hermetic package using inorganic materials in order to provide extended life, however, units can be made which include organic materials for other shorter life applications.

[0005] The package comprises an LED lead frame of suitable material such as ceramic, which mounts LED's used by the control system to aim the movable mirror as well as circuitry to electrically connect the LED's to their package terminations. As will be discussed below, the LED's provide signals for controlling the position of the movable mirror so that any two mirrors in an array can be positioned to reflect a light beam precisely at each other so that the light beam is focused entirely on the reflective surface of the mirrors and in that way no energy of the beam is lost in the reflection process of the switched connection. The LED's are die and wire bonded to the lead frame using conventional techniques. The LED's are located so that lines drawn through diagonal pairs would pass through a selected location on the lead frame which is referenced the movable mirror. A mirror assembly, described below, is attached to the lead frame so that the center of the mirror portion coincides with the selected location on the lead frame in order to accurately locate the mirror relative to one another for proper control of mirror movement. The mirror assembly and lead frame are mounted in a header of suitable material, such as ceramic which, along with driving means and a wiring harness, are in turn mounted on a bracket. The package is received in a housing in which an optical fiber is received and in which another mirror is disposed in alignment with the fiber for reflecting an optical signal from the fiber to the movable mirror.

[0006] MEM micromirrors are presently used to build digital micromirror display (DMD) devices where the mirrors rotate about a single axis by an electrostatic drive. The mirror of the present invention provides two axes of motion and is preferably driven magnetically. The micromirror is preferably made from a single piece of crystal material such as silicon and has three portions connected by two sets of hinges. An inner portion forms the mirror. One of the hinge pairs, one hinge on each of two opposite sides of the mirror portion, ties the mirror portion and the middle gimbals portion, which surrounds the mirror portion. This allows the mirror portion to rotate about the gimbals portion, providing the first axis of rotation. The second set of hinges ties the gimbals portion and the frame portion, one hinge on each of two opposite sides on a line disposed, 90 degrees relative to a line drawn through the first set of hinges. This allows the gimbals portion, which carries the mirror, to rotate about the frame portion, providing a second axis of rotation.

[0007] Two pair magnets, one for each axis of rotation, are used to move the mirror portion and are mounted on one face of the single piece to form a mirror assembly. The first pair of magnets are attached by suitable means to the mirror portion of the mirror assembly, one on each of two opposite sides of a line, 90 degrees relative to a line through the mirror/gimbals portions set of hinges. When magnetically stimulated, the mirror portion rotates about the mirror/gimbals portions set of hinges, providing the first axis of motion. The second

pair of magnets are suitably attached to the gimbals portion of the mirror assembly, one on each of two opposite sides of a line, 90 degrees relative to a line drawn through the gimbals/frame portions set of hinges. When magnetically stimulated, the mirror and gimbals portions rotate about the second set of axis, to providing the second axis of rotation.

[0008] According to a feature of the invention, an additional magnet is provided at each magnet location, with the poles in opposing relationship to each other and disposed on the opposite face of mirror assembly to balance the weight of the magnets relative to the hinge centerlines of the mirror assembly, eliminating undesirable oscillations under external shock or other conditions.

[0009] According to a modified embodiment, a single magnet can be utilized located in the center of the mirror portion, on the face opposing the surface serving as the mirror.

[0010] According to another feature of the invention, motion stops, disposed in a plane described by the two axes of rotation, are added to the mirror assembly at each hinge location to limit motion and thereby prevent failure of the hinge. Tabs are preferably formed in the plane described by the two axes of rotation, extending from the mirror portion to the gimbals portion and from the gimbals portion to the frame portion, to prevent rotation during initial manufacture. Sometime prior to final assembly, laser or other suitable cutting means severs the tabs, preferably perpendicular to each respective axis of the hinges, to allow free rotation.

[0011] In order to obtain extended operation without degradation, the mirror assembly is preferably hermetically assembled into a cavity in the package to lock out moisture and allow the provision of a benign atmosphere for micromirror operation. The cavity can be filled with selected gases to provide improved heat transfer and, if desired, exclude oxygen or other gases that would adversely affect the micromirror over time. The hermetic package comprises the header in which the cavity is formed and which includes sealed pins for electrical LED connection pins. A peripheral seal surface on the header extending around the cavity is coated with indium or suitable non-organic seal materials, for later attachment of a window over the cavity. The use of indium allows the seal to be made at room temperature to avoid seal temperature induced stresses and window distortions. Indium or other non-organic attach materials are used exclusively to assembly all items within the body cavity of the hermetic package, avoiding any unwanted long term organic out gassing or other similar problems.

[0012] According to another feature, the window is tilted at a slight angle, such as 6 degrees, to deflect unwanted stray light away from the desired optical path.

[0013] The lead frame assembly described above, containing LED's and the mirror assembly, is placed in and attached to the body on a platform within the cavity. The tabs preventing rotation of the mirror and gimbals

portions during assembly may now be released as described above. The body cavity is sealed with a glass window that preferably has been treated with anti-reflective coatings.

[0014] An air coil drive assembly is used and preferably employs a push and pull arrangement for driving the mirror magnets to rotate the mirror portion to the desired orientation in its two axes. Four air coil assemblies, comprising copper wire coiled on a bobbin, are attached to a mounting bracket, trapping a flex circuit harness and are aligned with the mirror assembly. The air coil leads are soldered to the flex circuit harness to allow system electrical control of the air coils and their push pull arrangement to drive the mirror assembly. The air coil bobbins are made of aluminum or other eddy current generating material, and sufficient amounts of aluminum are provided at the top and bottom of the bobbins to allow eddy current dampening of the movable portions of the mirror assembly, to prevent unwanted oscillations. In order to prevent overheating and loss of mirror position control, the air coil bobbins are made of high heat transfer material, such as aluminum, and the bobbins are massive relative to the air coils. The mounting bracket is massive relative to the bobbins and is also made of a high heat transfer material, such as aluminum. The bracket is in intimate contact with the optical unit housing, which in turn is in intimate contact with the ultimate heat sinking of the customer's system.

[0015] According to yet another feature, the air coil bobbins trap the flex circuit harness to the bracket when the air coil bobbins are attached to the bracket to facilitate later location and assembly of the flex circuit to the bracket. The LED pins of the header assembly are soldered to the appropriate pads on the flex circuit harness. The micromirror can fully be tested at this point. The header assembly is then rotated and aligned with the mounting bracket and joined by fixing the header assembly to the mounting bracket. The open area around the air coils is then potted with heat conductive material to ensure optimum assembly rigidity and improved heat transfer.

[0016] Other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following description.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0017] For a more complete understanding of the present invention and further advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a schematic view of an optical switching station showing two optical switching units;

Fig. 2 is a schematic view of one of the optical switching units shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a plan view of a mirror assembly used in the Fig. 2 switch unit;

Fig. 3a is a cross sectional view taken on line A-A of Fig. 3;

Fig. 3b is a view similar to Fig. 3a but showing rotation of the mirror portion of the mirror assembly;

Fig. 3c is a cross sectional view taken on line B-B of Fig. 1 ;

Fig. 3d is a view similar to Fig. 3c but showing rotations of the gimbals portion of the mirror assembly;

Fig. 4 is an enlarged cross sectional plan view taken on line E-E of 3a showing a hinge and an in-plane motion stop;

Fig. 5 is an enlarged, broken away portion of Fig. 4 showing a portion of the in-plane stop;

Fig. 6 is a cross sectional plan view taken on line E-E of Fig. 3a, showing a hinge with an optional lock down tab to stop rotation used during manufacture;

Fig. 6a is a view similar to Fig. 6 showing the lock down tab severed to allow rotation;

Fig. 7 is a top plan view of an optical switch package made in accordance with the invention;

Fig. 7a is a cross sectional view taken on line C-C of Fig. 7;

Fig. 7b is a view similar to Fig. 7 showing rotation of the mirror portion of the mirror assembly;

Fig. 7c is a cross sectional view taken on line D-D of Fig. 7;

Fig. 7d is a view similar to Fig. 7c but showing rotation of the gimbals portion of the mirror assembly;

Fig. 8 is an exploded view of a cross sectional, broken away portion of the bottom wall of the housing of an optical switching unit package and the mounting bracket;

Fig. 9 is a top plan view of a modified embodiment of an optical switch unit with certain parts removed for purposes of illustration;

Fig. 9a is a cross sectional view of the top portion of an optical switch unit taken on line F-F of Fig. 9; and

Fig. 9b is a view similar to Fig. 9a but showing rotation of the mirror portion of the modified mirror assembly.

5 Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments

[0018] Fig. 1 shows the layout of a matrix optical switch station comprising a plurality of parallelly extending optical switch units 5 and 15, two being shown for purposes of illustration, but any number can be provided as desired. These switch units are mounted in a frame 3 such that they are aligned with optical switch mirror 11 fixedly mounted in housing 1. An end portion of fiber optics cable 17 is mounted in a selected fixed position within housing 15 and fiber optics cable 7 is similarly affixed into the housing of optical switch 5. A light signal 13 is transmitted in cable 17 and is directed by optical switch unit 15, by reflecting light signal 13 from optical switch mirror 11 to another selected optical switch unit, such as optical switch 5, which directs light signal 13 into cable 7.

[0019] A light beam controlled by a single movable mirror will enter various target positions with an angle of incidence that varies with the target position of the beam. The use of two movable mirrors in the system allows a beam of light emitted on a longitudinal axis to be directed at any angle by the first movable mirror and exit the second movable mirror on a defined longitudinal axis that is invariant with changes in the incident angle of the beam. By maintaining a defined axis for the light beam, the use of two movable mirrors acts to simplify any lens used for an optical switch.

[0020] The light signal is optimized to minimize transmission losses by the optical units. As seen in Fig 2, light beam 13 carried by optical cable 17 is reflected by a fixed mirror 25 mounted within optical switch 15 to a moveable mirror 29, shown in a solid line in its middle or neutral unpowered position. Mirror 29 is moveable between two opposite extremes, 29', 29", with light beam 13 correspondingly reflected to 13', 13", respectively.

[0021] The first movable mirror 29 selects the target position for creating an optical path. Movable mirror 29 can select any one of a plurality of optical switch units to create an optical connection by directing the light beam 13 to the movable mirror on the second unit. Light beam 13 when it is targeted on the second movable mirror is again reflected at an angle that is based on the incident angle of the beam. By operating the second movable mirror the incident angle of the beam can be changed such that the light is reflected on the longitudinal axis of the second optical switch unit.

[0022] LED's mounted in an array adjacent a first movable mirror 29, as disclosed below, provide radiation which is detected by detector 16. Radiation from the LED's in the array associated with the first movable mirror is received in a radiation guide of another, selected fiber and individually measured by control 100 (Fig. 7a).

The position of the associated movable mirror of the selected fiber is adjusted until radiation received from each LED from the first mirror is substantially equal, as described in relation to moving fiber ends in patent number 5,177,348, supra.

[0023] Although the movement of the mirror shown in Fig 2 illustrates movement in one plane, mirror movement in a second plane is also included in the operation of the switch and will be described below.

[0024] Mirror assembly 41, Fig. 3, is preferably formed from one piece of crystal material such as silicon, etched to provide an outer frame portion 43 forming an opening in which an intermediate annular gimbals portion 45 is attached at opposing hinge locations 55 along first axis 31. An inner, centrally disposed mirror portion 47, having a mirror 29 centrally located thereon, is attached to gimbals portion 45 at hinge portions 55 on a second axis 35, 90 degrees from the first axis. Mirror 29 is suitably polished on its upper surface to provide specular surface and, preferably, is similarly polished on its lower surface as well, in order to prevent stresses in the material which could otherwise cause a certain warpage due to the thinness of the sheet material, e.g., on the order of 100 microns.

[0025] A first pair of permanent magnets 53 is mounted on gimbals portion 45 along the second axis and a second pair of permanent magnets 53 is mounted on extensions 51, which extend outwardly from mirror portion 47 along the first axis. In order to symmetrically distribute mass about the two axes of rotation to thereby prevent oscillation under shock and vibration, each permanent magnet 53 preferably comprises a set of an upper magnet 53a mounted on the top surface of the mirror assembly 41 using conventional attachment techniques such as indium bonding, and an aligned lower magnet 53b similarly attached to the lower surface of the mirror assembly as shown in Figs. 3a-3d. The magnets of each set are arranged serially such as the north/south pole arrangement indicated in Fig 3c. There are several possible arrangements of the four sets of magnets which may be used, such as all like poles up, or two sets of like poles up, two sets of like poles down, or three sets of like poles up, one set of like pole down, depending upon magnetic characteristics desired.

[0026] By mounting gimbals portion 45 to frame portion 43 by means of hinges 55, motion of the gimbals portion 45 about the first axis 31 is provided and by mounting mirror portion 47 to gimbals portion 45 via hinges 55, motion of the mirror portion relative to the gimbals portion is obtained about the second axis 35, thereby allowing independent, selected movement of the mirror portion 47 along two different axes.

[0027] The middle or neutral position of mirror assembly 41 is shown in Fig. 3a, which is a section taken through the assembly along line A-A of Fig. 3. Rotation of mirror portion 47 about axis 35 independent of gimbals portion 45 and/or frame portion 43 is shown in Fig 3b as indicated by the arrow. Fig. 3c shows the middle

position of the mirror assembly 41, similar to that shown in Fig. 3a, but taken along line B-B of Fig. 3. Rotation off the gimbals portion 45 and mirror portion 47 about axis 31 independent of frame portion 43 is shown in Fig. 3d as indicated by the arrow. The above independent rotation of mirror 29 of mirror portion 47 about the two axes allows direction of light beam 13 as needed by the optical switch units.

[0028] In order to protect hinges 55 from in-plane shock during handling and shipping, stops 57 are provided according to an optional feature of the invention as best shown in Figs. 4 and 5, which are enlarged sectional views taken on line E-E of Fig. 3a. At this point it

of *suspension 43*
of *hinge channels 55*
direct *channel 55*
de *channel 55*
90 *channel 55*
20 *channel 55*
frame *channel 55*
55 *channel 55*
an *channel 55*
mic *channel 55*
plane *channel 55*
toward *channel 55*
such as *channel 55*
jection co *channel 55*
desired. Si *channel 55*
30 gimbals port *channel 55*
motion of hinge *channel 55*

[0029] According to another optional feature of the invention, lock down tabs associated with each hinge are provided. As seen in Fig. 6, an example showing one such hinge 55, bridge portion 67 extends from gimbals portion 45 to frame portion 43 and locks the two portions together isolating hinge 55 from all normal manufacturing stresses. At the appropriate manufacturing step, the bridge portion 67 is cut providing gap 69 as shown in Fig 6a, which allows normal rotation of gimbals portion 45 relative to frame portion 43 about the hinge 55. This provides suitable stress protection for all hinges and significantly improves manufacturing yields.

[0030] With reference to Fig. 3, extensions 51 are preferably provided with laterally extending tabs 51a which can be used to clamp down the mirror portion during assembly to thereby provide additional stress protection.

[0031] The movable mirror assembly 41 is received in a cavity 81a of a header 81 which forms part of the mirror assembly package shown in Figs. 7-7d. Header 81 is formed of any suitable material, such as ceramic in the case of a hermetic package and plastic where hermeticity is not required, and has a circumferentially extending shelf 81b formed within cavity 81a on which frame portion 43 of mirror assembly 41 is received. Bottom wall 81c is spaced from shelf 81b to provide clearance for movement of gimbals portion 45 and mirror por-

tion 47. Recesses 81d are formed in bottom wall 81c aligned with each set of magnets 53 to provide motion clearance for lower magnets 53b. The size of the opening of recesses 81d is maintained as small as possible, allowing suitable motion of the magnets, to facilitate making wall 81e as thin as practicable, for example 125 microns.

[0032] The magnet drive for the magnets comprise four air coils 89 (two shown in Figs. 7c-7d) each wound on a bobbin in turn mounted on mounting bracket 85 and aligned with respective recesses 81d and magnets 53. The bobbin and bracket are made of suitable material for good heat transfer, magnetic dampening, and strength such as aluminum. The air coils are wound using high electrical conductivity materials such as copper. The bobbin has an air coil disposed proximate to top end 89a of bobbin 89 such that the air coil is as close to magnets 53 as possible, for example, 200 microns, to provide full mirror rotation using minimum power.

[0033] An electrical wiring harness 87 is provided for required electrical connections to the micromirror assembly package 99 and comprises an elongated flex circuit 87 mounting a connector 95 at one end thereof for connection to a control system (indicated at 100, Fig. 7a). An opening 87b is formed at an opposite end which receives therein bobbins 89. Coil leads 97 are attached to appropriate traces on the flex circuit as shown in 7c-7d. A plurality of diode pins 79 are mounted in bores provided in shelf 81b and extend above and below the shelf. The upper portion of the diode pins are connected by leads 77 to respective conductive pads 75a-75h (see Fig. 7) and on the lower end are connected to respective traces on electrical harness 87. LED's 71a-71d are assembled to board 75 in according to conventional semiconductor techniques and are powered by the traces on the harness discussed above. The LED's 71a-71d are positioned so that they can be used to direct the light beam 13 using the optic unit's sensing control system 100. The control system can be similar to that described in U.S. Patent No. 5,177,348, as discussed above.

[0034] Once the electrical connections are made to the diode pins 79, window 83 is attached to the open side of header 81, closing cavity 81a. The closing of cavity 81a can be made to be a hermetic seal by using known techniques such as employing indium as the window seal material and glass sealing or the like sealing of the diode pins 79 to the header 81. If desired, a protective atmosphere such as nitrogen can be trapped within the cavity. The window is of suitable material to allow transmission of light signal 13 with minimum losses and is preferably tilted approximately 6 degrees relative to the plane in which mirror assembly lies, to deflect unwanted stray light. In this respect, the spacing between gimbals portion 45 and mirror portion 47 is maintained sufficiently large to avoid unwanted stray light.

[0035] After the electrical connections are made between diode pins 79 and harness 87 completing all elec-

trical connections, header 81 with all of its internal components described above, are aligned with mounting bracket 85 and its components and potted in place with thermally conductive, strong potting material 93 to complete the micromirror assembly package 99.

[0036] With particular reference to Fig. 8, micromirror assembly package 99 is precisely mounted and orientated in optical switch unit 15 utilizing cooperating registration surfaces of mounting bracket 85 and a portion of wall 16 of switch unit 15. First opposing tapered surfaces 107 and 105 forming a somewhat convex configuration on mounting bracket 85 cooperate with respective second opposing tapered surfaces 103 and 101, respectively, on bottom wall 16 of the switch unit. Mounting bolt 113 is received through bore 111 in bracket 85 and threaded bore 16a in the cradle in bottom wall 16 to secure micromirror assembly package 99 within optical switch unit 15. The cooperating opposed surfaces provide a precise registration in two planes while bolt 113 and its corresponding bore 111 in bracket 85 and threaded bore 16a in wall 16 provides registration in a third plane.

[0037] An alternate embodiment is shown in Fig.9 in which a single permanent magnet 54 is centrally located on the lower side of the mirror portion 47. Air coils 89a-89d are shown located in the same positions as in the Figs. 3-7 embodiment and can be independently exited so that the interaction of the magnetic field of the permanent magnet and the coils cooperate to produce the appropriate magnetic field to cause movement of the mirror portion along each axis 31 and 35, as desired. Although four air coils are shown, if desired, three air coils could be used to produce the desired magnetic field.

[0038] Although the invention has been described with regards to specific preferred embodiments thereof, variations and modifications will become apparent to those skilled in the art. For example, magnet and air coil locations other than those described above can be employed as long as appropriate currents can be applied by means of control 100 to the air coils to move the gimbaled mirror to a desired orientation. In this respect, with reference to the four coil arrangement shown, a push-pull drive in control 100 is preferred. Further, although permanent magnets are shown attached to the movable mirror assembly, it will be appreciated that, if desired, magnetic material could be added to the assembly instead of the permanent magnets and polarized perpendicular to the mirror surface. It is therefore the intention that the appended claims be interpreted as broadly as possible in view of the prior art to include all such variations and modifications.

Claims

1. Optical switching apparatus comprising,

- a header having a bottom wall and upwardly extending side walls forming a recess, a platform formed along the side walls spaced above the bottom wall,
a micromirror formed from a single piece of material having an outer frame portion lying in a plane and supported on the platform, an intermediate rotational gimbals portion hinged to the frame portion and movable relative to the frame portion about a first axis and an inner rotational mirror portion having a reflective, upper face surface formed with a radius of curvature of at least 2 meters hinged to the gimbals portion for movement of the mirror portion relative to the gimbals portion about a second axis, at least one magnet attached to one of the rotational portions, and
at least one electromagnetic coil assembly disposed in close proximity to the mirror assembly for applying selected forces to the at least one magnet for causing desired movement of the gimbals portion and the mirror portion along the two axes to reflect an optical beam directed to the mirror portion in a selected direction.
2. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 in which the gimbals portion is hinged to the frame portion by a pair of hinges spaced apart along the first axis and the mirror portion is hinged to the gimbals portion by a pair of hinges spaced apart along the second axis.
 3. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 in which the axes are disposed 90 degrees relative to one another.
 4. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a plurality of light emitting diodes mounted on the frame portion for providing control signals.
 5. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a pair of magnets for driving movement of the gimbals portion disposed on spaced apart locations of the gimbals portion along the second axis and a pair of magnets for driving movement of the mirror portion disposed on spaced apart locations of the mirror portion along the first axis.
 6. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 5 in which each magnet comprises a set of an upper magnet attached to an upper face surface of the respective gimbals portion and mirror portion and a lower magnet attached to a lower surface of the respective gimbals portion and mirror portion, the respective upper and lower magnets of a set being in alignment with each other.
 7. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 in which the at least one electromagnetic coil assembly is disposed in engagement with the bottom wall of the header, a respective coil assembly being in alignment with each spaced apart magnet location.
 8. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 7 in which each coil assembly comprises a bobbin having a spool on which a coil is wound and an aluminum plate portion between the respective coil and the bottom wall of the header, the bobbins having a massive heat sink portion of heat conductive material relative to the respective coils on a side of the coils remote from the plate portion.
 9. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 8 further comprising a flex circuit electrically connected to the coils and to the LED's and a mounting bracket formed of heat conductive material, the flex circuit received on the mounting bracket, the mounting bracket being relatively massive relative to the coil assemblies, the header mounted on the mounting bracket with the coil assemblies therebetween and heat conductive potting material disposed between the header on one side and the flex circuit and the mounting bracket on another side.
 10. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 5 further comprising a push-pull drive for exciting the magnets.
 11. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a single magnet mounted on a lower face surface of the mirror portion.
 12. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 11 further comprising a plurality of electromagnetic coil assemblies spaced apart adjacent to but out of alignment with the single magnet.
 13. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 in which the piece is formed of silicon.
 14. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 13 in which the mirror portion has a lower face surface and both the upper and lower face surfaces are polished thereby providing improved surface flatness.
 15. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 2 in which the frame portion has spaced apart, inwardly extending stop tabs on either side of the first axis and the gimbals portion has an extension along the first axis fitting closely between the stop tabs to limit motion in the plane in which the gimbals portion lies.
 16. Optical switching apparatus to claim 2 in which the gimbals portion has spaced apart, inwardly extending stop tabs on either side of the second axis and

the mirror portion has an extension along the second axis fitting closely between the stop tabs to limit motion in the plane in which the mirror portion lies.

17. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 15 further comprising a projection formed on one of the stop tabs and the extension and extending toward the other of the stop tabs and the extension. 5
18. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 16 further comprising a projection formed on one of the stop tabs and the extension and extending toward the other of the stop tabs and the extension. 10
19. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 in which the header is ceramic and a glass window is attached to the header covering the recess, the glass window being attached with indium forming a hermetic seal with a selected atmosphere sealed in the recess. 15 20
20. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a mounting bracket formed of heat conductive material, the header mounted on the bracket, the bracket being formed with a first portion having a pair of spaced apart surfaces lying in respective planes which intersect each other, a package having a bottom wall, the bottom wall having an upwardly extending mounting pad formed with a second portion having a pair of complementary, spaced apart surfaces, one of the first and second portions forming a concave cradle and the other of the first and second portions forming a convex protrusion received in the cradle, the first and second portions being fixed to one another. 25 30 35
21. Optical switching apparatus according to claim 19, in which a bore is formed through the bracket intermediate to the spaced apart surfaces of the first portion and a threaded bore is formed between the pair of complementary, spaced apart surfaces of the second portion and the portions are fixed together by a threaded member received through the bore of the bracket and threaded into the threaded bore. 40 45
22. Optical switching apparatus comprising, 50

a header having a bottom wall and upwardly extending side walls forming a recess, a platform formed along the sidewalls spaced above the bottom wall, a micromirror assembly formed from a single piece of material having an outer frame portion lying in a plane and supported on the platform, an intermediate rotational gimbals portion hinged to the frame portion and movable relative to the frame portion about a first axis and an inner rotational mirror portion having a reflective, upper face surface hinged to the gim-

bals portion for movement of the mirror portion relative to the gimbals portion about a second axis, at least one magnet attached to one of the rotational portions, and

at least one electromagnetic coil assembly disposed in close proximity to the mirror assembly for applying selected forces to the at least one magnet for causing desired movement of the gimbals portion and the mirror portion along the two axes to reflect an optical beam directed to the mirror portion in a selected direction.

23. A method for making a movable mirror comprising the steps of taking a piece of silicon and forming an outer frame portion, an intermediate gimbals portion connected by a hinge to the frame portion and an inner mirror portion connected by a hinge to the gimbals portion, attaching the mirror portion to the gimbals portion at locations on both sides of the respective hinge, attaching the gimbals portion to the frame portion at locations on each side of the respective hinge to prevent movement of the respective portions in a plane in which the piece lies and severing the attachment at each location at any selected time prior to use.
24. An optical beam switching system for transmitting an optical beam from a source to anyone of a group of optical receptors comprising,

a focusing lens for focusing an optical beam and directing the optical beam along a selected path,
a first movable mirror mounted in the selected path,
a plurality of second movable mirrors and a plurality of optical receptors,
a control for moving the first movable mirror to direct the optical beam to any selected second mirror and for moving the selected movable mirror to direct the optical beam to a selected optical receptor for transmission of the optical beam from the focusing lens to the selected optical receptor.
25. An optical beam switching system according to claim 24 in which each optical receptor is mounted in optical receiving relationship with an associated second movable mirror.
26. An optical beam switching system according to claim 24 further comprising radiation emitters disposed adjacent each movable mirror to provide a feedback signal to the control for adjusting the position of the movable mirrors to minimize transmission loss of the optical beam to the receptor.
27. An optical beam switching system according to

claim 24 in which each optical receptor is an end of an optical fiber having a longitudinal axis and the position of the movable mirrors are adjusted to direct the optical beam along a path coincident with the longitudinal axis of the selected optical receptor.

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28. An optical switching system according to claim 27 in which the focusing lens and the first movable mirror are mounted in a housing and each second movable mirror and associated optical fiber are mounted in a respective separate housing.

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29. An optical beam switching system according to claim 28 further comprising a stationary mirror in each housing for folding the path of the optical beam.

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30. An optical beam switching system according to claim 24 in which the movable mirrors are movable about at least one axis of rotation.

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31. An optical switching system according to claim 24 in which the movable mirrors are movable about two axes of rotation.

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32. An optical beam switching system according to claim 31 in which the two axes of rotation are disposed ninety degrees relative to one another.

33. An optical beam switching system for switching an optical beam from a first optical fiber to any other selected optical fiber of a group of optical fibers comprising,

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a plurality of optical switch units, each unit having a housing for receiving an end portion of an optical fiber, a fixedly mounted mirror mounted in each housing in alignment with a respective optical fiber for reflecting an optical beam transmitted through the optical fiber toward a mirror assembly mounted in the housing in spaced apart relation to the fixedly mounted mirror, the mirror assembly comprising a single piece of material having a portion movable about at least one axis.

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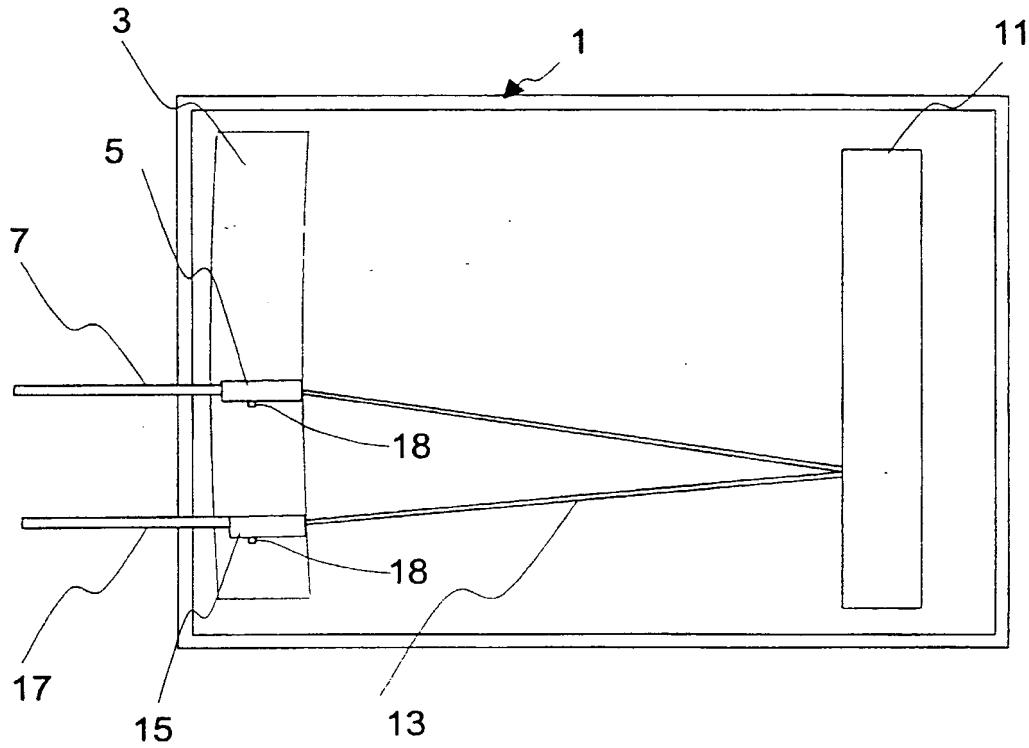


Fig. 1

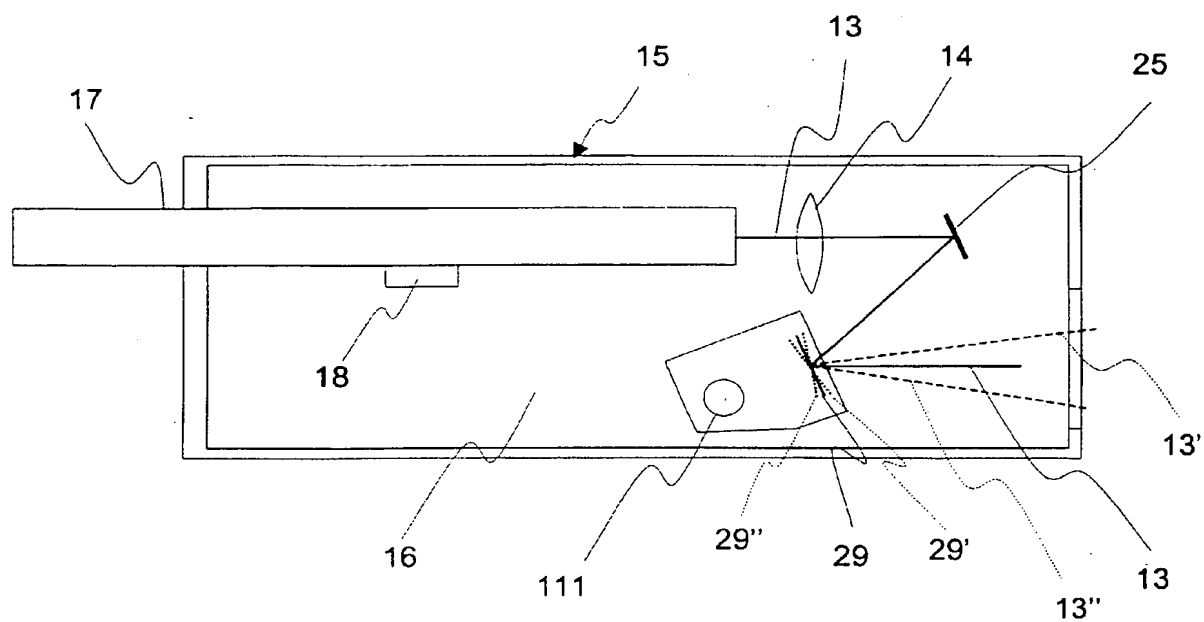


Fig. 2

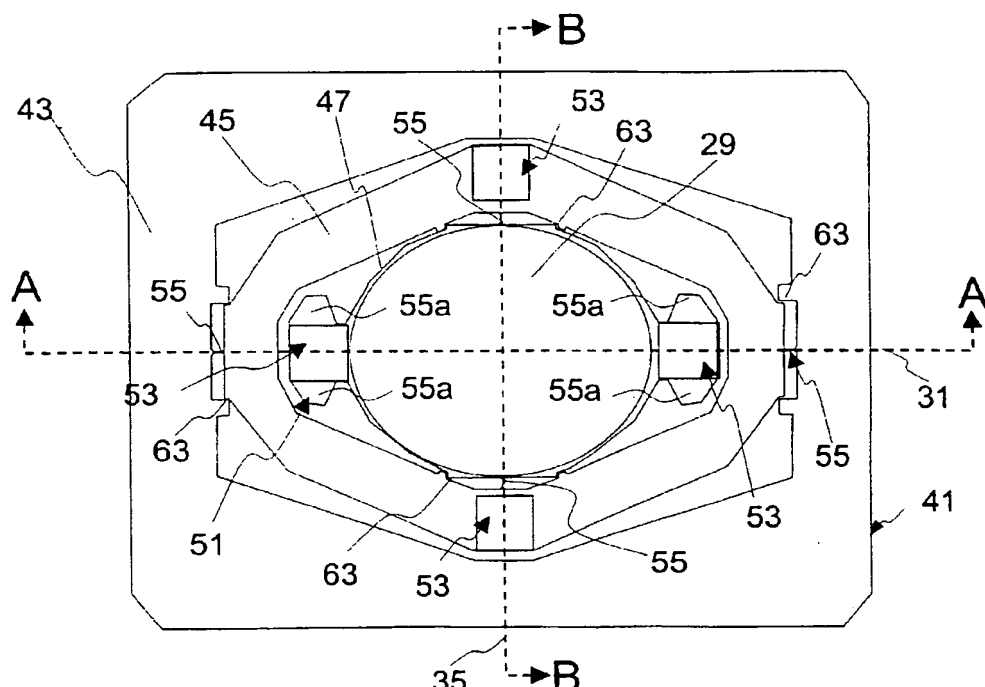


Fig. 3

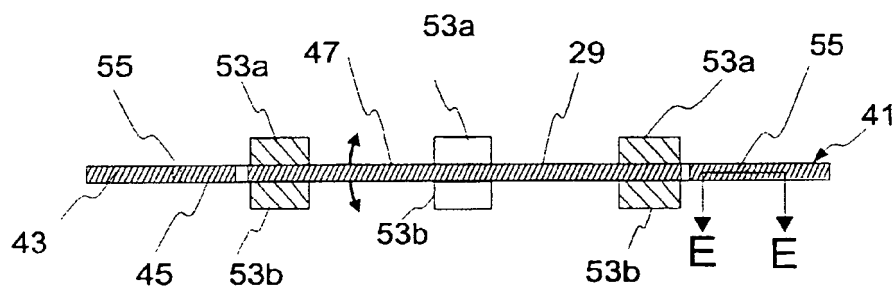


Fig. 3a

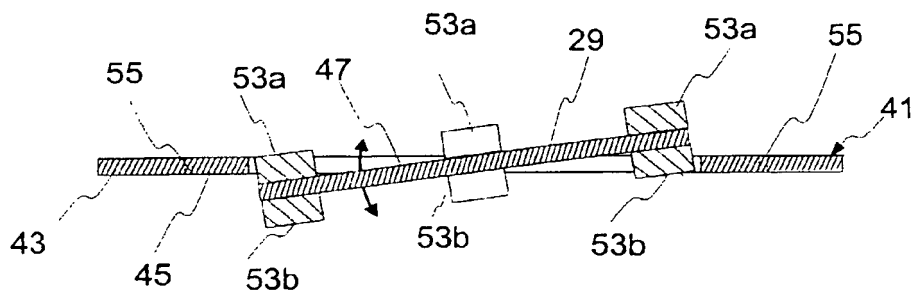


Fig. 3b

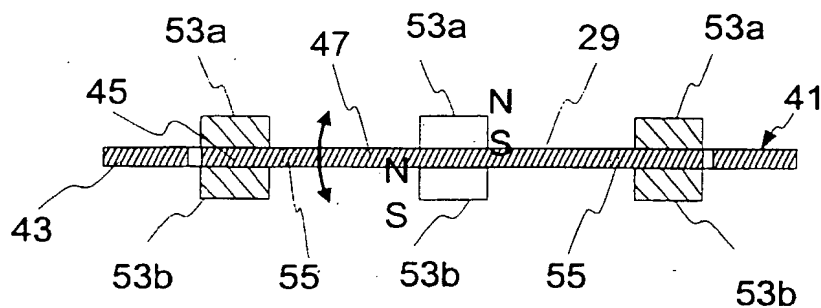


Fig. 3c

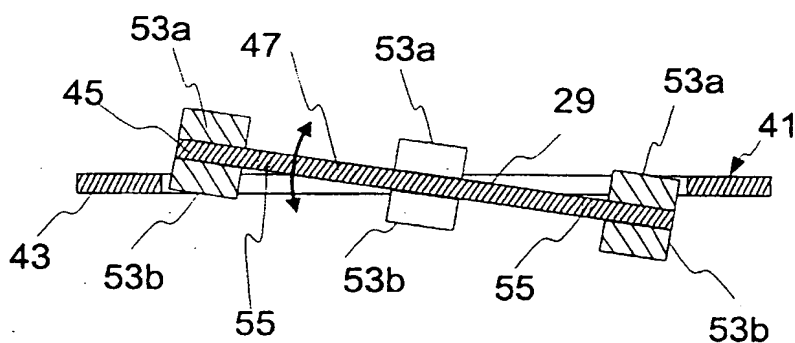


Fig. 3d

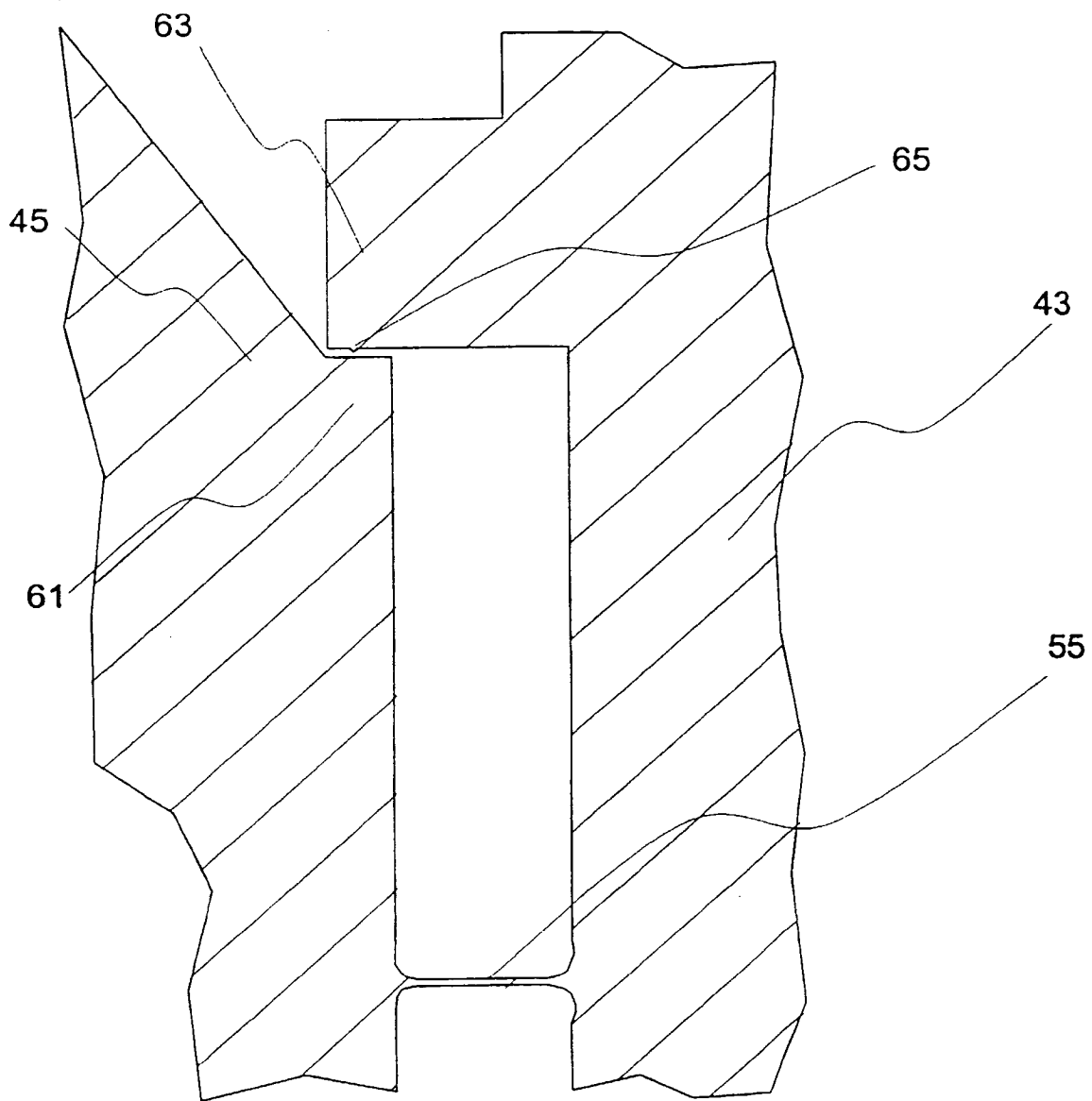


Fig. 4

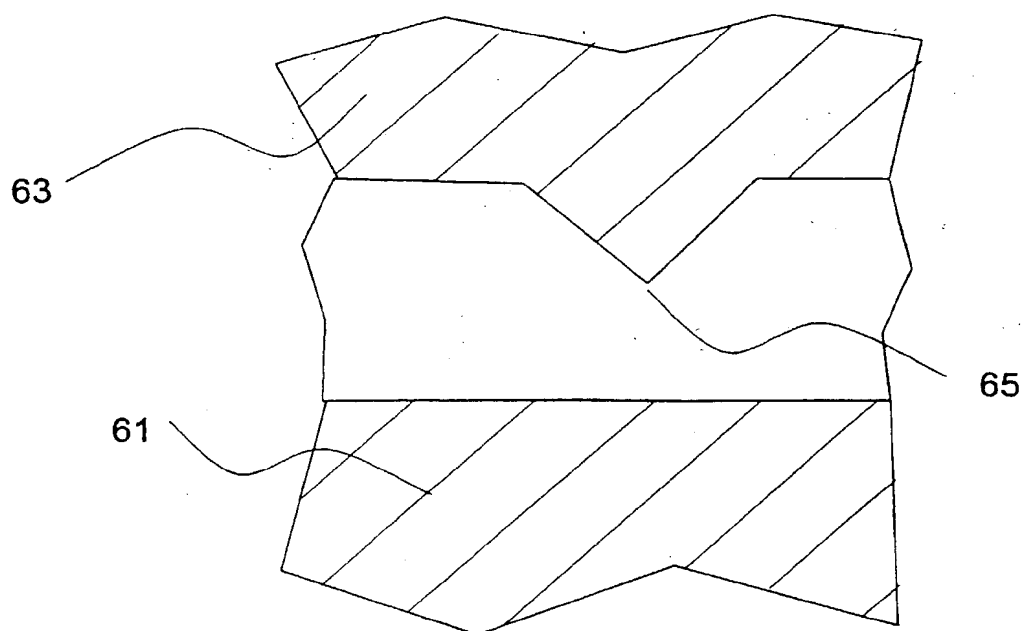


Fig. 5

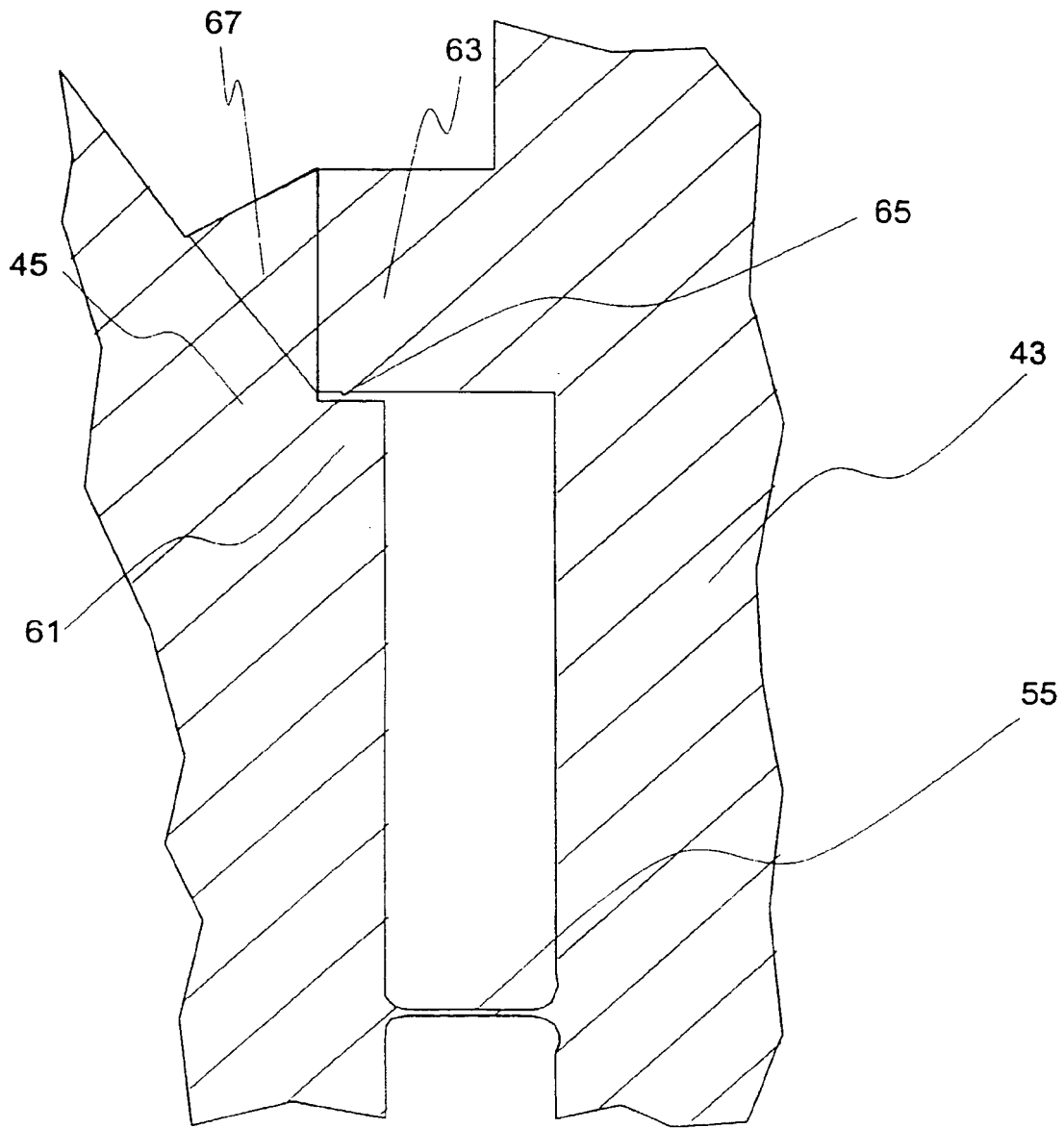


Fig. 6

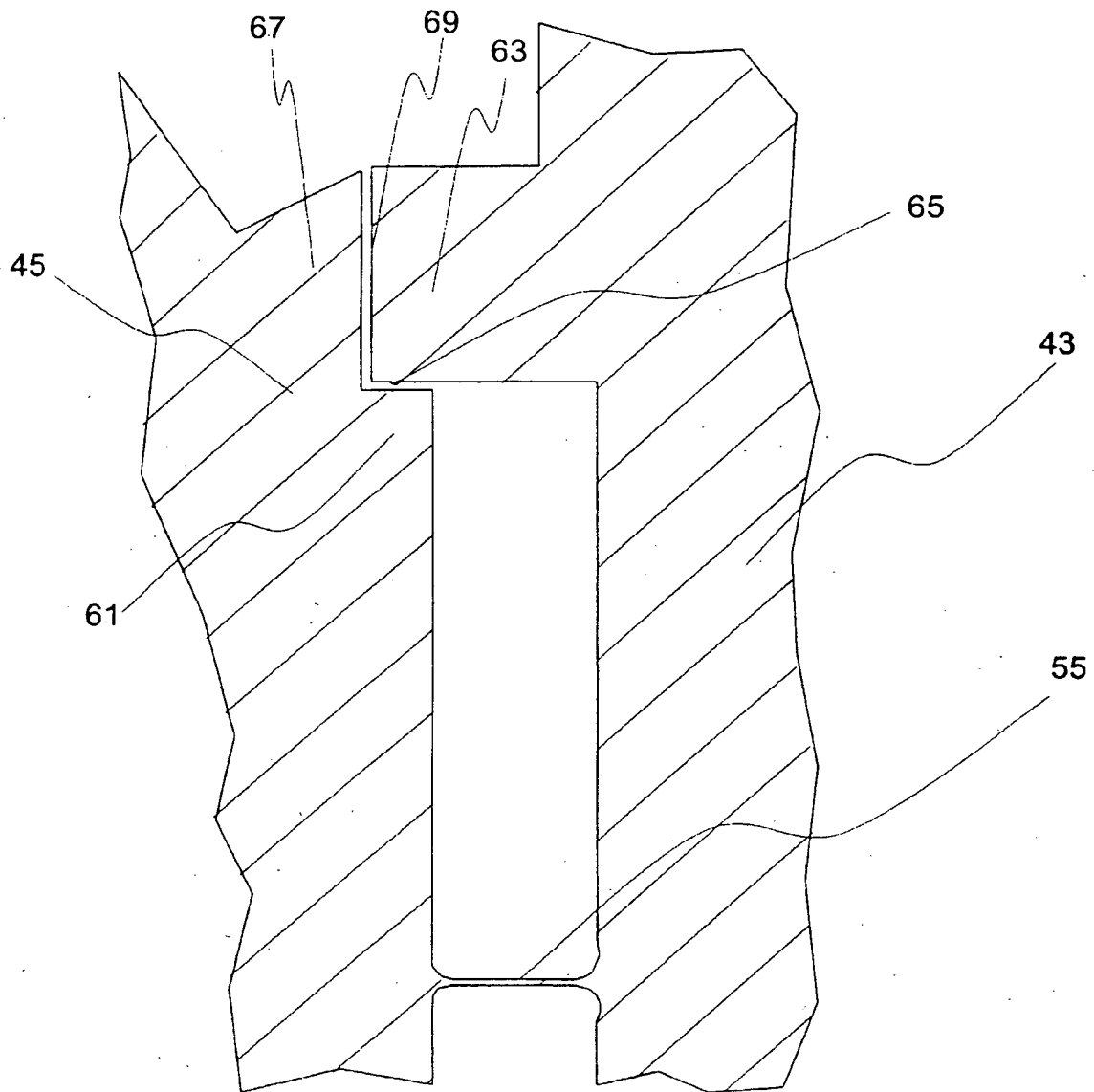


Fig. 6a

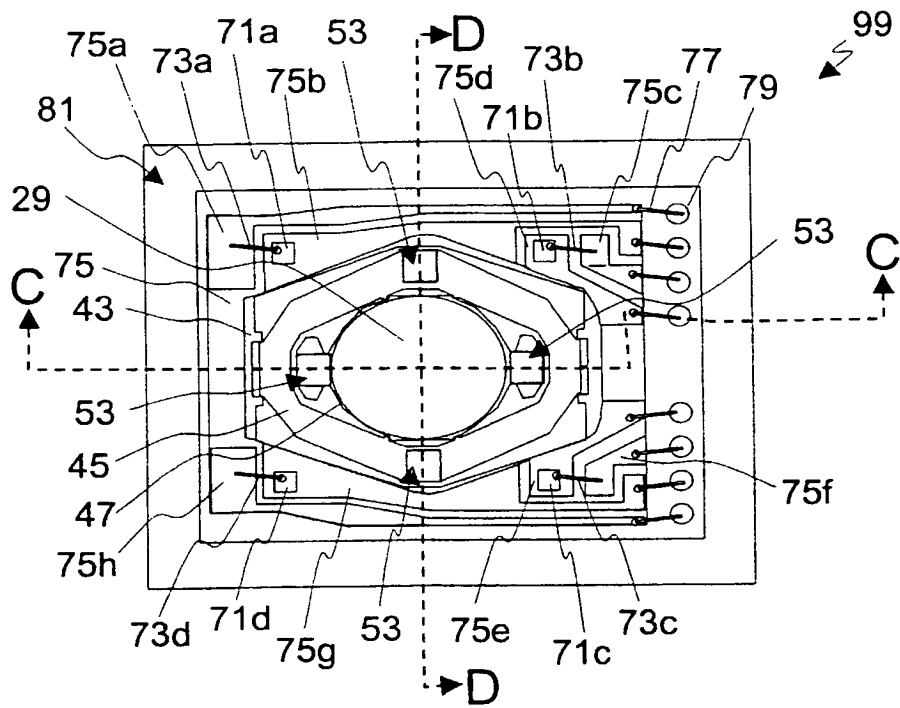


Fig. 7

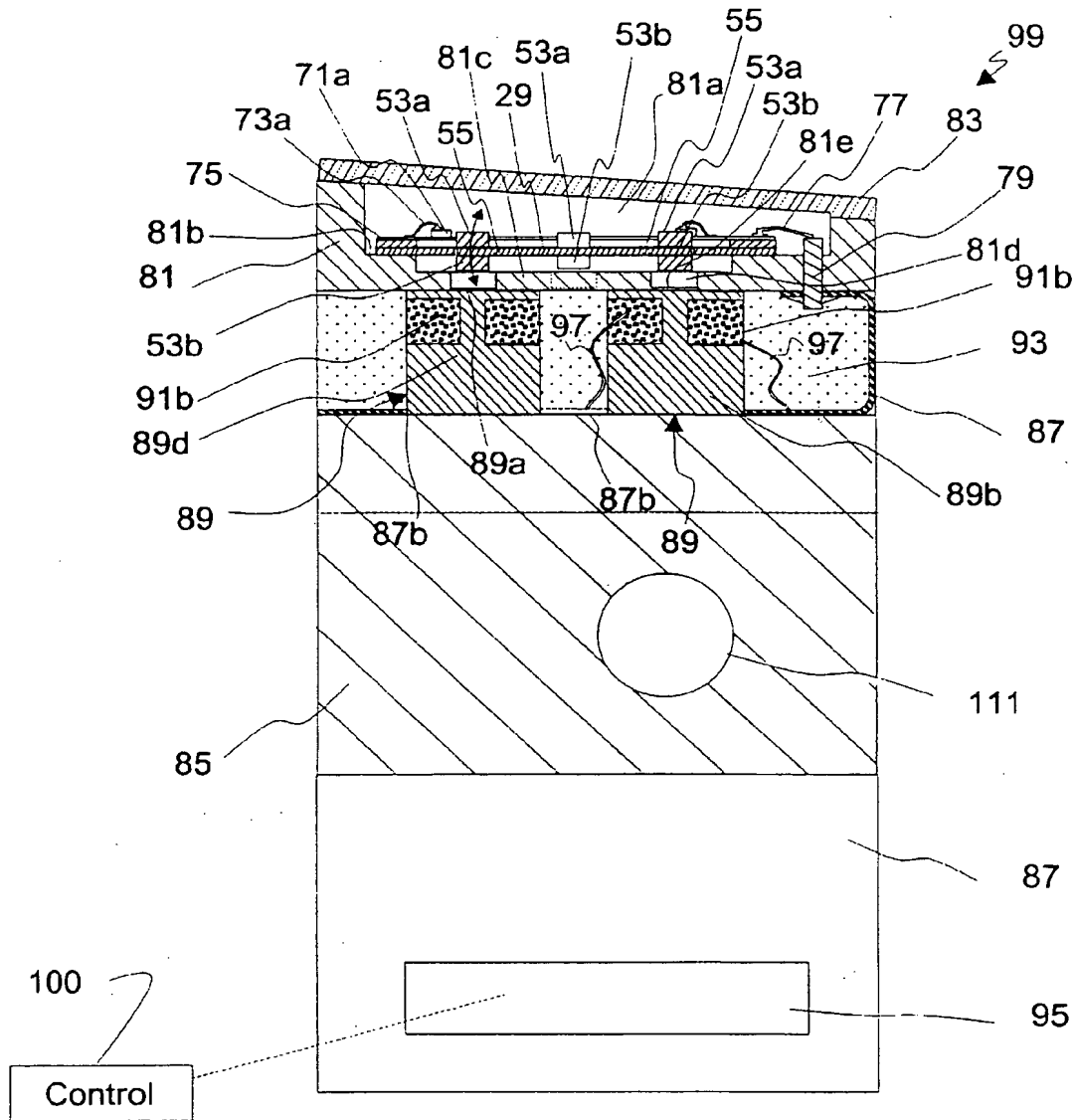


Figure 7a

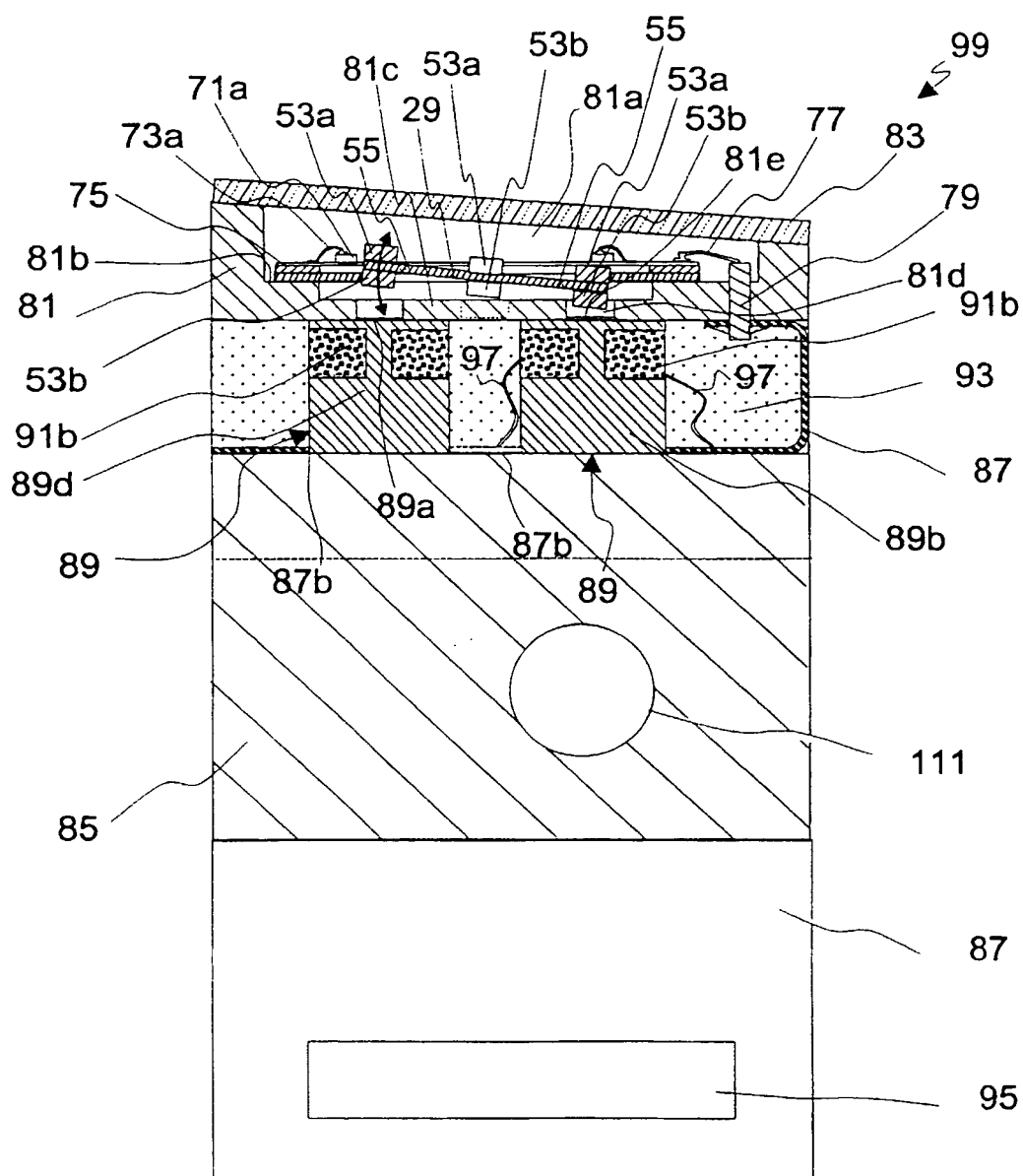


Figure 7b

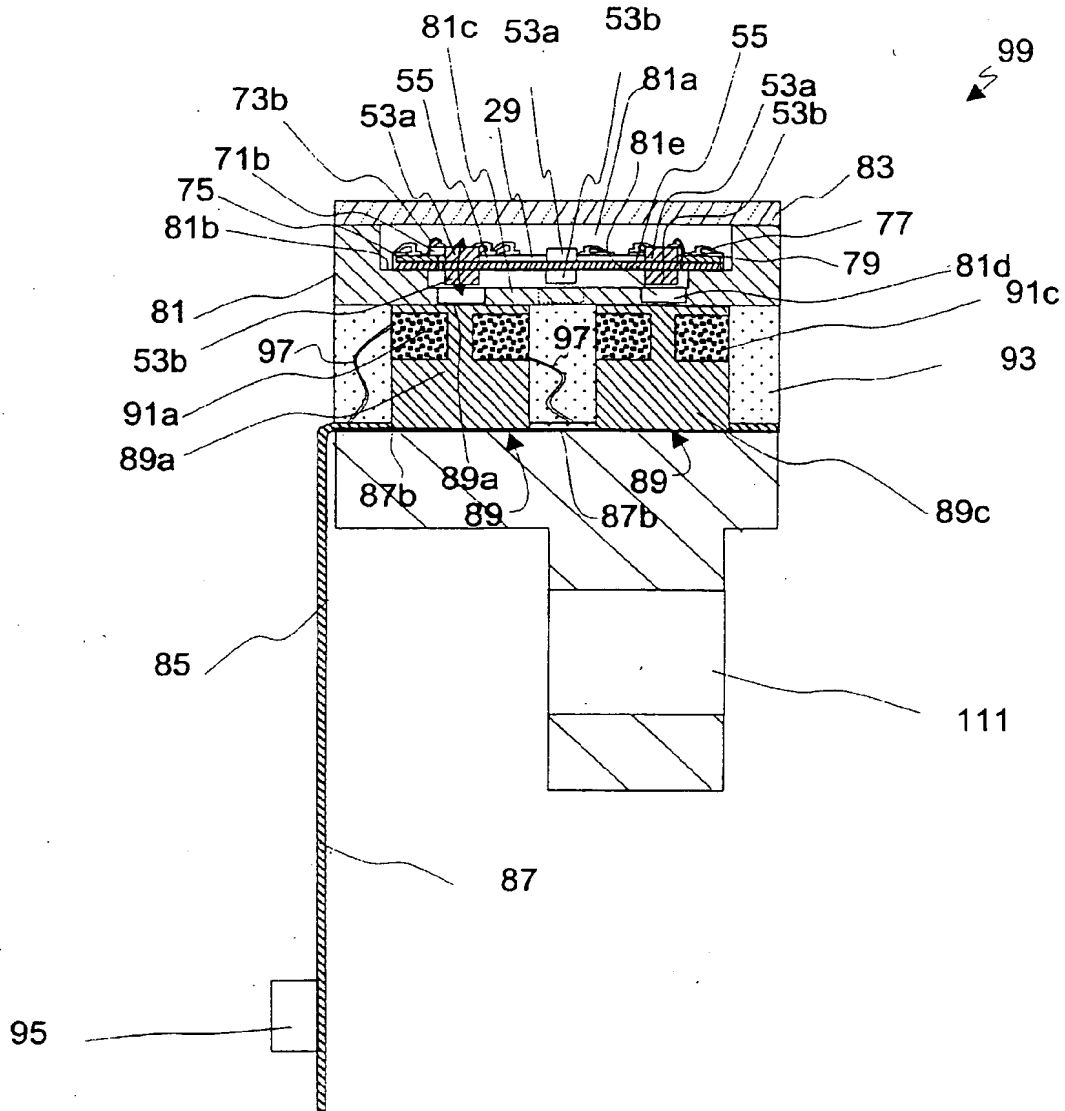


Figure 7c

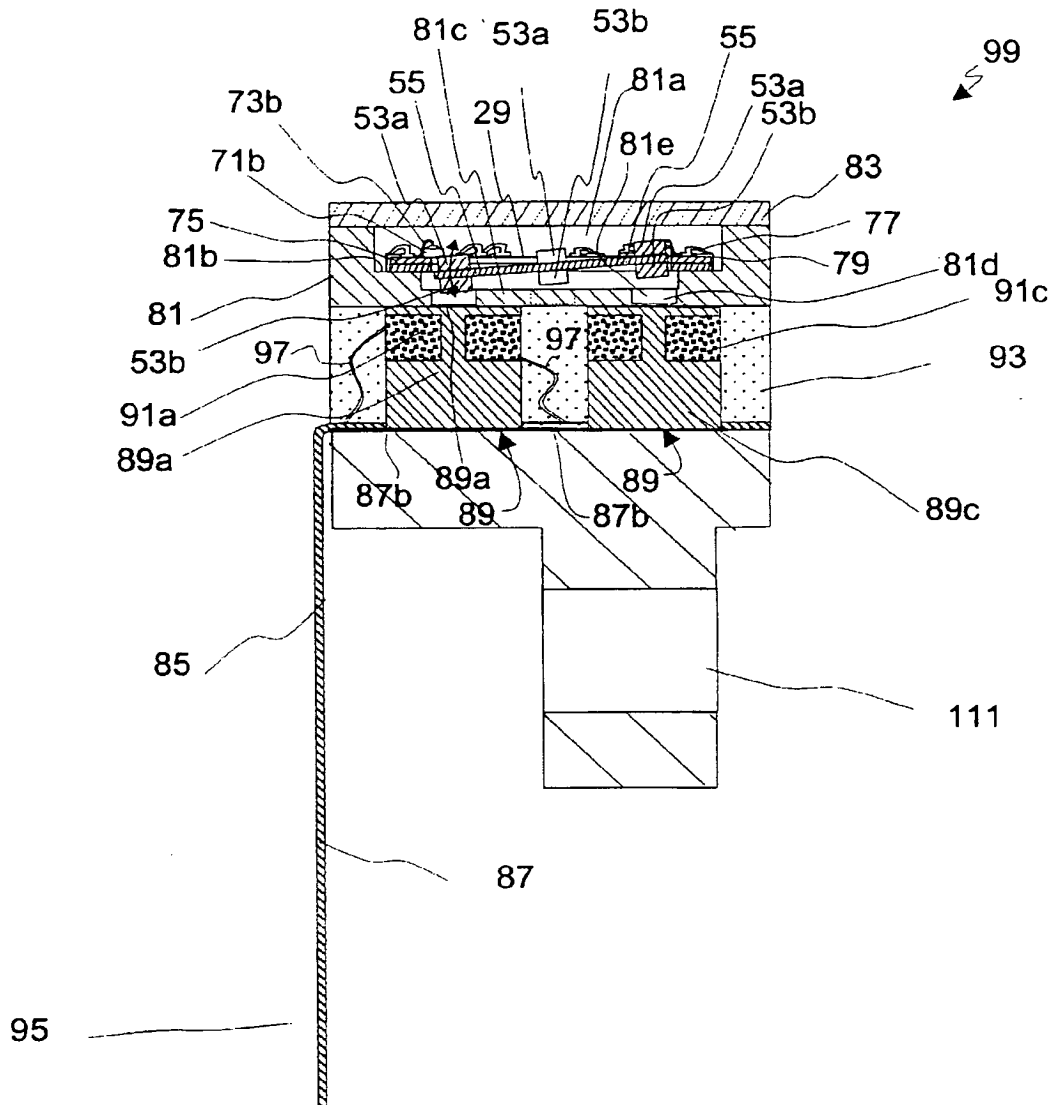


Figure 7d

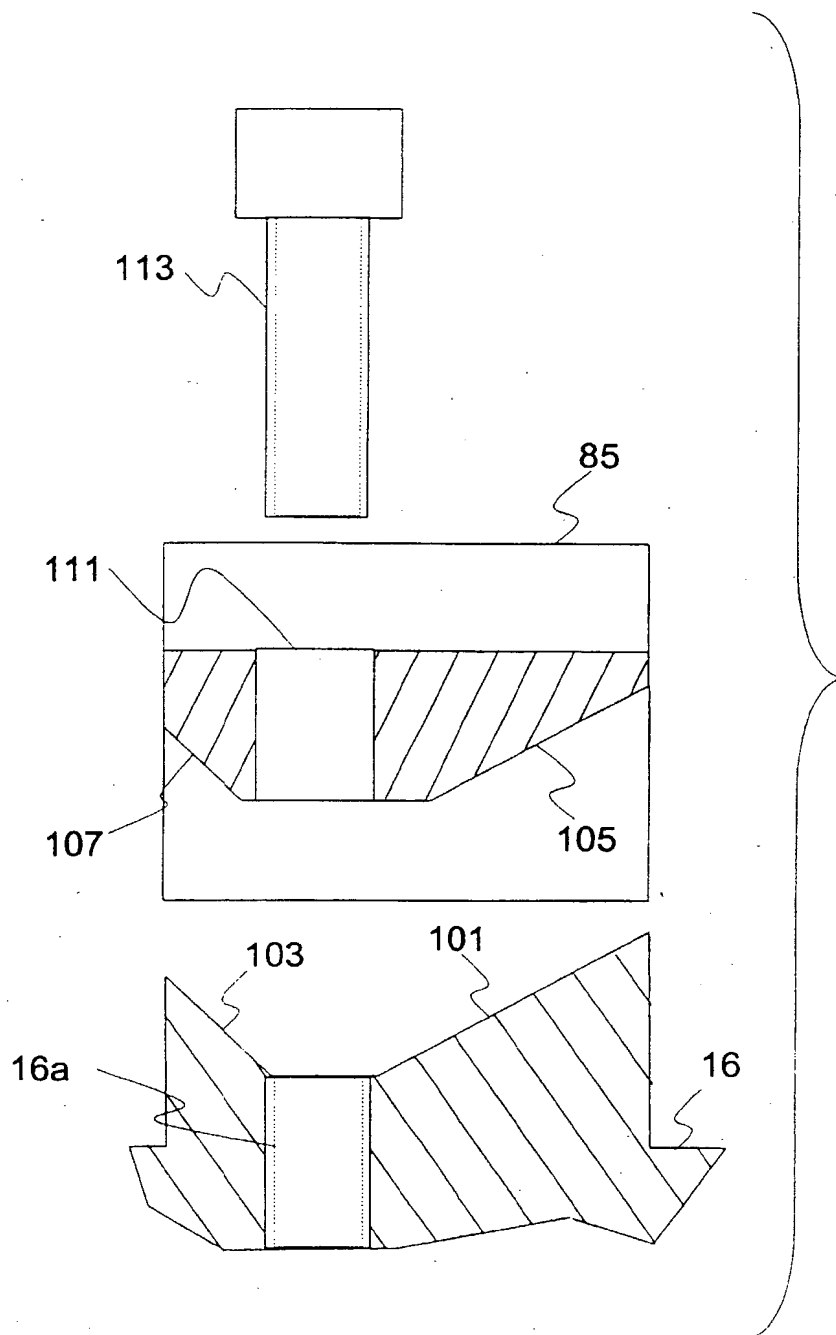


Fig. 8

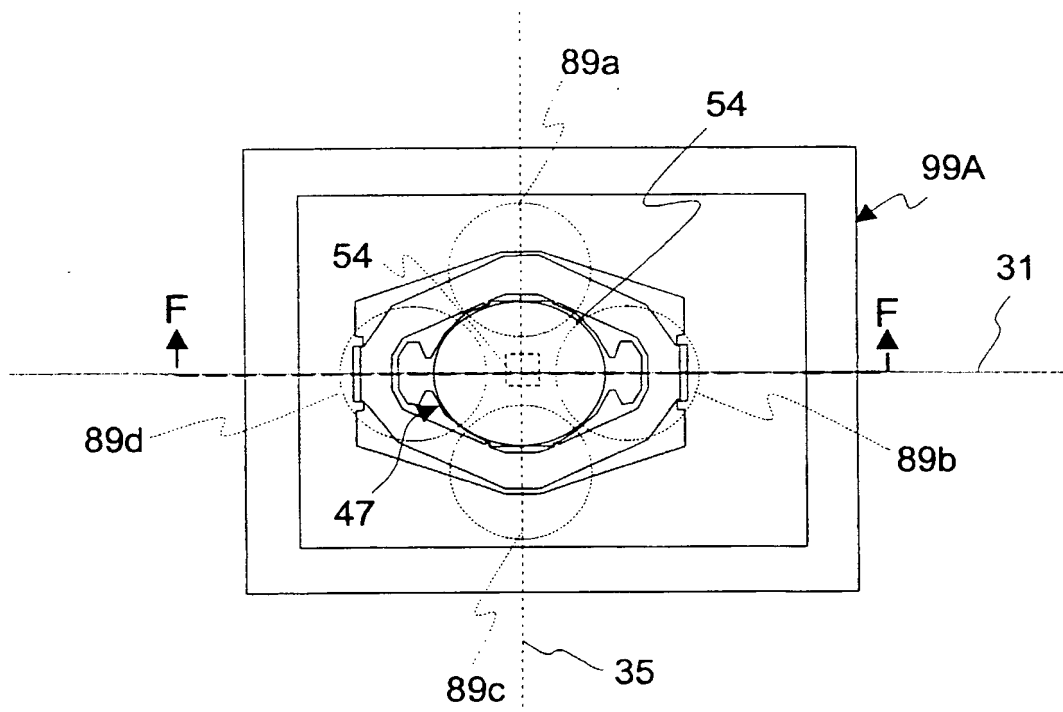
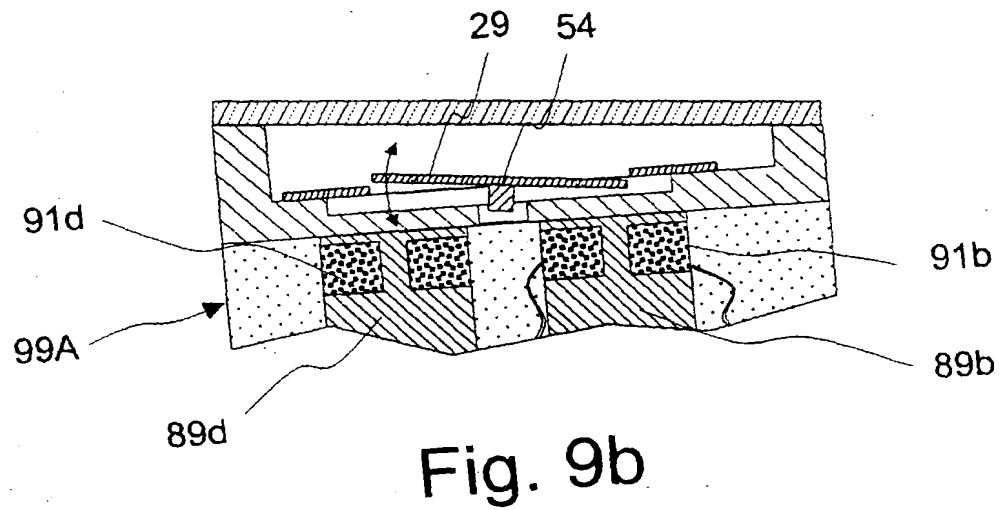
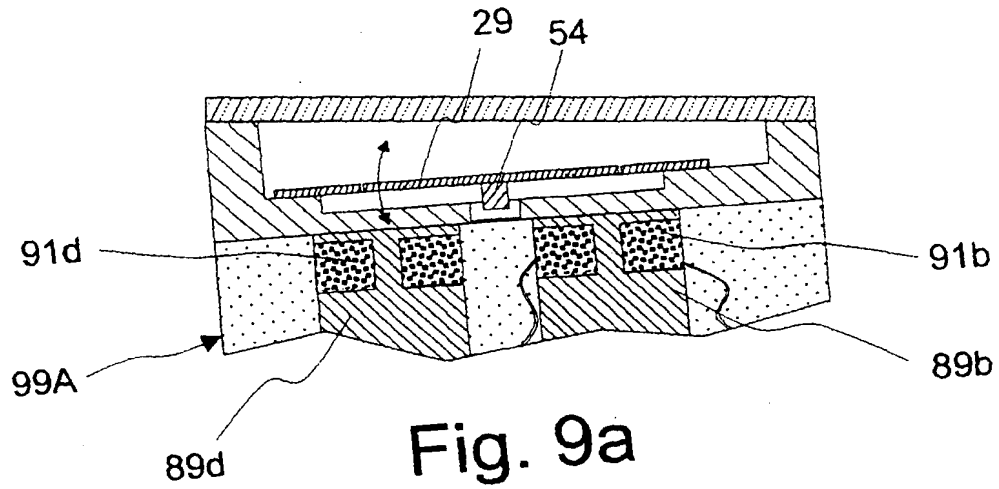
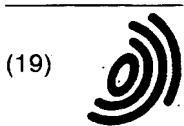


Fig. 9



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(54) Optical switching apparatus

(57) An optical matrix switch station (1) is shown mounting a plurality of optical switch units (15, 17), each of which includes a mirror (29), moveable in two axes, for purpose of switching light beams from one optical fiber to another. A mirror assembly (41) is formed from a single body of silicon and comprises a frame portion (43), gimbals (45), mirror portion (47), and related hing-

es (55). Magnets (53, 54) and air coils (89) are utilized to position the central mirror surface (29) to a selected orientation. The moveable mirror and associated magnets along with control LED's (71) are hermetically packaged in a header (81) and mounted with the air coils on mounting bracket (85) to form a micromirror assembly package (99) mounted in each optical switch unit.

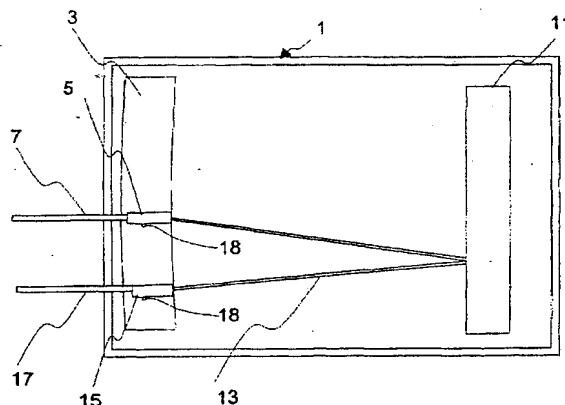


Fig. 1



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 30 3869

| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | | |
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| The present search report has been drawn up for all claims | | | |
| Place of search MUNICH | | Date of completion of the search 7 November 2002 | Examiner Riblet, P |
| CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document | | T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document | |

EPO FORM 1503 03/82 (P04/001)



European Patent
Office

Application Number

EP 99 30 3869

CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

- ☐ Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):
- ☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

- ☐ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.
- ☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☒ None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:

1-23



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 99 30 3869

| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Category | Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages | Relevant to claim | CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6) |
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| | | | TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6) |
| <p>The present search report has been drawn up for all claims</p> | | | |
| Place of search | | Date of completion of the search | Examiner |
| MUNICH | | 7 November 2002 | Riblet, P |
| <p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p> | | | |

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European Patent
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**LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET B**

Application Number

EP 99 30 3869

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-23

relates to an optical switching apparatus comprising a header with a recess and a micromirror within the recess which can be rotated along two direction axes. The problem underlying this concept is to increase the flexibility of use of the micromirror.

2. Claims: 24-32

relates to an optical beam switching system comprising a first movable mirror directing selectively the light to a plurality of second movable mirrors. The problem underlying this concept is to enable a beam of light emitted on a longitudinal axis to be directed at any angle and exit the system on a defined longitudinal axis that is invariant with changes in the incident angle of the beam.

3. Claim : 33

relates to an optical beam switching system comprising a plurality of optical switch units, each unit comprising a fixedly mounted mirror and a mirror assembly comprising a movable portion. The problem underlying this concept is to minimize transmission losses in the optical switch units of the system.

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 99 30 3869

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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07-11-2002

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

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